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Audience with Members of the National Council of the Italian Adult Catholic Scouts Movement (MASCI)

This morning, in the Vatican Apostolic Palace, the Holy Father Francis received in audience the members of the National Council of the Italian Adult Catholic Scouts Movement (MASCI), on the occasion of the seventieth anniversary of its founding.

The following is the Pope's address to those present:

Address of the Holy Father

Dear brothers and sisters, welcome!

I am very happy to meet you on the seventieth anniversary of your founding. Indeed, on 20 June 1954, thanks to the work of Mario Mazza and Fr. Ruggi d'Aragona, the Italian Adult Catholic Scouts Movement was officially born in Rome. The Association of Knights of Saint George, had already existed for around a decade, with the aim of bearing witness in life to the contents of the Scout Law and Promise. However, it now defined itself more precisely, focusing on values of which you are still heirs, guardians and promoters today: *community, education, service, care for the common home*.

I like the title you have chosen: "*More life to life*", because life brings us fullness; we must work for fullness. You wanted to embody this in some symbolic projects to be realized: to give a *thermal crib* to the Lampedusa First Aid and Reception Centre; building a nautical carpentry workshop in Zambia; and planting a forest in Argenta, Romagna. These initiatives touch on important values, which is why I would like to take a moment with you to reflect on them.

First, the *crib*, which reminds us of the love for nascent life. We live in a time with a dramatically declining birth rate. Think that the average age of Italians is 46 years! The average age of Albanians is 23. This lets us

understand. A dramatically declining birth rate. My secretary told me that while he was crossing the square, he saw a lady with a baby stroller... He approached to see the baby, and it was a dog! A dramatic denatality, in which man seems to have lost the joy of generating and taking care of others, and perhaps even the taste for life. A crib instead symbolizes the joy of a child coming into the world, the commitment to ensure that it can grow well, the expectation and hope for what it may become. The crib speaks to us of the family, a welcoming and safe nest for the little ones, a community founded on the gratuitousness of love; but also, by reflection, it speaks to us of attention to life in all of its phases, at every stage, especially when the passing of the years or the roughness of the journey make the person more vulnerable and in need. And it is significant, in this sense, that your gift is destined for the *Lampedusa First Aid and Reception Centre*: this further underlines that love for life is always open and universal, desirous of the good of all, regardless of origin or any other condition.

The second initiative: *carpentry workshop*. Carpenters, no? The carpentry workshop is a symbol dear to us Christians, because the Son of God chose it as the place where He prepared Himself for his mission of salvation in His village, in Nazareth, working humbly "with human hands" (*Gaudium et spes*, 22). In a world where much is said – perhaps too much – about producing weapons to make war – an economist told me that at the moment, the investment that gives the largest return is arms production – this reminds us of our vocation, the fundamental vocation of humanity to transform God's gifts not into tools of death, but instruments of good, in the common commitment to building a just and peaceful society where everyone is given the possibility of a dignified life. The dignity of life. Working for the dignity of life.

Finally, third project: the *forest*. This reminds us of our responsibility for the common home, that the Creator entrusted to our hands. Respect, love and direct contact with nature have been particular characteristics of scouting ever since its origin. And they are values we are in great need of today, as we find ourselves ever more powerless in the face of the consequences of irresponsible and short-sighted exploitation of the planet, prisoners of lifestyles and behaviour that are as selfishly deaf to any call for common sense as they are tragically self-destructive; insensitive to the cry of a wounded earth, as well as to the voice of so many brothers and sisters unjustly marginalized and excluded from a fair distribution of goods. In the face of this, the sober, respectful and frugal style of scouts is a great example to everyone!

You have decided to plant your trees in Argenta, in memory of Don Giovanni Minzoni. He was a courageous priest who, in a context of violent and arrogant hostility, fought also through scouting to form his young people in "a solid Christian life and a consequent commitment to the transformation of society" (Saint John Paul II, *Letter to Archbishop E. Tonini of Ravenna*, 30 September 1983, on the 60th anniversary of the death of Don Minzoni). This too is an important reminder, a reminder of that *integral ecology* which, starting from taking charge of climatic and environmental emergencies, broadens its reflection by considering, further ahead, "our unique place as human beings in this world and our relationship to our surroundings" (Encyclical Letter *Laudato si'*, 15).

Dear friends, thank you for what you are and what you do! I encourage you to persevere along your path, *semel scout semper scout*, as your motto says. It is good for you to continue to be an open and caring community, ready to welcome, listen and accompany those whom the Lord places in your path; a prophetic community courageously proclaiming the Gospel and eager to step out of your own circle to meet others, especially those who inhabit the existential peripheries of your time.

I accompany you with my blessing and my prayer. And I also ask you to pray for me, please. Thank you.
